

Wildland Fire Annex
To the
Madison County
Disaster and Emergency Plan

(September 2006)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan (PDM) for Madison County identifies wildland fire as one of the top hazards faced by the county. At the time that plan was developed, the wildfire situation was already under study through a contract with Fire Logistics, Inc. The resulting plan, known as the Madison County Strategic Wildland fire Plan was subsequently incorporated into the PDM where it became the core of the county's effort at prevention and mitigation of the threat of wildland fire. Slightly earlier, in 2000, the Big Sky Fire Management Strategy provided similar information and guidance for the Big Sky area. Meanwhile, portions of Madison County have and continue to experience enormous residential and commercial growth, much of it in the wildland/urban interface (WUI), greatly exacerbating the risks and potential impact of wildland fires. It is the intent of this Annex to provide a document that will identify the general policies, procedures and over-all responsibilities governing planning, preparations, response and recovery for wildland fire which may threaten throughout the County.

SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Fire Protection Services. In addition to Gallatin Canyon Consolidated RFD and the Madison County volunteer fire departments, the Montana Department of Natural Resources, the US Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are involved in fire and land management within the county. Yellowstone Club has a private fire department within the Madison County portion of the Big Sky area. Various combinations of any or all of these organizations may be involved in response to a wildland fire. In all cases, participating agencies are governed by the provisions of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and its included management infrastructure, the Incident Command System (ICS).

B. Policy. Key policy points which have an affect on county fire management (Taken from the Federal Wildland Fire Policy):

- Protection of human life is the first priority in wildland fire management. Property and natural/cultural resources jointly become the second priority.
- Where wildland fire cannot be safely reintroduced because of hazardous fuel build-up or some other factor, some form of pretreatment must be considered, particularly in the wildland/urban interface areas.
- All aspects of fire management will be conducted with the involvement of all partners. Programs, activities and processes must be compatible.
- The role of federal agencies in the WUI includes wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance.
- Structural fire protection in the WUI is the responsibility of state and local government.

C. County Environment. Located in southwestern Montana with a rapidly growing population of approximately 7,000 residents, Madison County is one of the state's largest counties at approximately 2.3 million acres or just under 3,600 square miles. Less than half is private land. The remainder is federal or state owned. Of the private land within the county, 75% is rangeland, 12% crop land/hay ground and about 9% is forested. The area is dry with a nominal annual rainfall in the 10 to 12 inch range. Beginning in the late 80's, Madison County has been under a long-term, severe drought. Climate is a primary determinate of fire risk and behavior. Wind, fuels development and a whole host of social and political factors are major influences. The county has suffered a number of significant large wildland fire events in recent years and

there is little reason to suspect that the propensity for wildland fire is likely to significantly decline in the years to come.

D. Risk. While risk assessment is a dynamic process, accurate only at a point in time, the Madison County Strategic Wildland Fire Plan provides an excellent overview of wildland fire risk within the County.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. Fire Protection Roles. All agencies, federal, state, local and private must inevitably work together as they try to cope with continuing growth in the county and the ever-present risk of wildland fire. Primary fire protections responsibilities differ, depending upon the type of land involved. Tax supported units of local government are generally established as Rural Fire Districts (RFD) having wildland and structural fire protection responsibilities with the boundaries of that district where there is no overlap with Forest Fire Protection District or Affidavit lands. Private lands within the rural fire district which are also within a federal area, such as USFS forests rely on federal agencies such as the USFS (the protecting agency) which can provide the highest level of wildland protection while the RFD (jurisdictional agency) would provide assistance and are considered a supporting agency. The Rural Fire Districts remain responsible for structural protection and other emergencies. Land outside the RFD boundaries but within the USFS boundary enjoy the protection of USFS from wildland fire but there is no statutory obligation for the any fire district to respond to a structural fire nor for the Forest Service to do so. Private lands not within federal areas may have no agency responsible for fire protection of either type. Options available to landowners include annexation into an existing RFD; forming a new rural fire district or fire service area or contracting with a local private fire agency or RFD.

B. Preplanning. Local agencies, such as the fire departments, the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and the appropriate departments of county and town government need to consider at least the following as part of their pre-planning effort in so far as the matter comes under their area of consideration:

- Risk assessment of homes and developments. If possible, this should include enlisting the assistance of homeowners, homeowner associations and developers in completing such a risk assessment.
- Determination of possible evacuation routes, reporting areas, road blocks, potential destinations and the like in case an evacuation of any magnitude should become necessary.
- Location of staging areas, shelter areas, medical and other logistical and informational support areas and the like, along with whatever transportation, communication and logistics assets might be required for each of them.
- Alternated Emergency Operation Center locations and their augmentation requirements.
- Trigger points for different geographic features and developments that would indicate the need to initiate warning and notification procedures.

ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Incident Command. The first responder on the scene is automatically the Incident Commander (IC) until relieved by competent authority capable of directing the initial attack. Subsequent changes of command will be guided by the fire protection responsibilities outline

previously and by such situational factors as may be pertinent. Difficult though it may be to “get off the fireline”, the Incident Commander’s primary responsibility is to direct the entire operation, as apposed to wielding a Pulaski or driving a bulldozer. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the IC to inform Dispatch of any changes and keep them apprised of the situation as it develops.

B. Responsibilities.

1. County Commissioners

- Execute a declaration of emergency or disaster within the county when appropriate.
- Request state or federal emergency or disaster declaration

2. Incident Commander. In virtually every case it is preferable that a fire suppression specialist act as IC of a wildland fire incident. This will frequently be the Fire Chief of the district in which the fire occurs, however other qualified firefighters or the leader of a specialized incident command team may become IC by mutual agreement. In all cases, the following responsibilities apply:

- Ensure that safety receives priority consideration in the development and execution of the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- Gain a clear understanding of the situation prior to assuming Incident Command
- Approve the Incident Action Plan after ensuring that consideration has been given to all resource values and risks. Brief staff and appropriate responders.
- Determine resource requirements and authorize release or requests for additional resources.
- Exercise tactical control of the operation.
- Direct and facilitate the effective flow of information, particularly to and from Dispatch, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and other major units of the response infrastructure. Utilize the Incident Status Summary (ICS 209) whenever feasible and appropriate.
- Conduct strategy and other meetings as needed.
- Determine effects of control actions on environmental and ecological processes.
- Approve Demobilization Plan.

3. Sheriff

4. Director of Emergency Management

- Encourage the development of defensible spaces around homes and subdivisions in the wildland/urban interface.
- Activate the Emergency Operations Center when directed by the Board of Commissioners; when requested by the Incident Commander or Sheriff and when, in the judgment of the Director, it becomes appropriate to do so.

5. District Fire Chiefs

ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

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